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INDIC AND INDIAN RELIGIOUS PARALLELS

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The word 'Indian' in my title is intended as an equivalent of the uncouth 'Amerindian,' a monstrosity which I find it impossible to pronounce with equanimity. It is not my intention to point out what is common to all or to much of the savage world, such as belief in ghosts, in another world, in the mana of the inanimate, in the Hindu forms of Squantum and Tantum as shared under different names with sundry peoples, but to indicate closer resemblances between the Indians of the East and of the West. Not often do we find religious groups so isolated. All the religions of antiquity were more or less fused. Sumerian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Celtic, the general foundation of European superstition, even the animal-gods of Africa and the Western origin of Japanese and also of Chinese culture—these are debatable topics bristling with queries. And now too we find even India invaded and the Persian conquest anticipated by the Assyrian; nay, even the Seven Stars that used to shine so naturally above the Panjab are at present marked 'made in Babylon.' But thus far the genuineness of Indic invention has not yet been impugned to such an extent as to make it probable that our Redskins ever provided India with its religious beliefs, while only a few daring souls have ventured to urge that the primitive culture of America derives from the reckless merchants of Egypt or from the devoted missionaries of the Buddhist church. We have then an unusually fair field or two fair fields in which to study religious flora and fauna presumably of independent creation. That no sane historian believes in a common root or seed of the growths found therein, this fact makes what in itself would be merely an interesting collection of parallels a valuable exhibit, in that it demonstrates how near and yet how far may be religious phenomena alike in form yet diverse in origin.

A parallel which elucidates a custom may well serve as a beginning. In Sanskrit literature we have numerous references to the vermilion line traced on a woman's head at the parting of the hair. In epic and drama it is always spoken of as a mere

adornment. As such it figures in the poetical description of dark clouds parted for a moment by a vivid streak of lightning 'like the vermilion line between a woman's cloudy hair.' In America, as an introduction to the parallel I would remind you that among the Siouan tribes it was customary at certain stages of a girl's life to paint red dots upon various parts of her body and that a dance with prayer was performed at each dot. In other words, this equivalent of tattooing¹ was a religious act, performed obviously with the intent of guarding the girl by means of the red paint. Now, however, the perfect parallel is found among the Blackfeet and Crow Indians, whose women were all adorned (note that it is here an adornment only) with a vermilion line drawn from the forehead to the crown at the parting of the hair. When we consider the religious significance of red paint as applied to village idols in India it is almost inevitable to conclude that the Indic and Indian means of beautifying women had a similar religious origin and that the thing of beauty was originally intended as a safeguard forever. Yet even without any explanation it is rather interesting to find the Rani and the squaw adorned in the same way.

Speaking of hair, I am tempted to violate my own rule and touch on one belief not confined to Indic and Indian thought. Nothing in religion is so curious as the persistence with which old ideas, quite outworn and yet potent, survive. You all know how savages believe in a hair-soul, that is in a hair-power, a spiritual vigor implicit in hair, to express it in terms slightly in advance of the hair-soul belief. Many traces of this remain in India. The ritual use of hair, the prayer over the first hairs cut from a child's head, the hiding of hair, etc., all hark back to this superstition. In America the same superstition takes many well-known forms. The Indians of Mexico and Peru offered the eyebrow-hairs in casual sacrifice to the Sun-god. Hair burned upon the mountain-top was offered to the sun in divination. In the North, the scalping of a foe was primarily to control the hair-soul and it was believed that the scalped Indian remained in the next world subject to him who held the scalp. That is the reason that the scalper not only took the scalp, but wore it. It was not a decoration but a deed of ownership; whoever held it possessed the soul of the scalpee. Now

¹ Regular tattooing was practised on the Peruvian littoral.

this belief in hair-power was still strong enough among some of the Northern tribes to give the chieftainship to the man with the longest hair. Some of the Mandan Indians grew hair six feet long and when an election took place this hair sometimes grew a foot longer. It was suspected that horse-hair was often deftly interwoven with a hero's locks and on several occasions it was charged that a chief owed his election to his pony rather than to his own spiritual superiority. I think it is most probable that an unadulterated form of this belief lies at the root of the rule which prohibited an Aztec priest of the Sun-god from ever cutting his hair. As with Samson's hair, there is here a clear connection with sun-strength; in fact in Mexico sun-beams are called sun-hair and Uitzilopochtli as sun-representative appears as 'hair of the sun.' One parallel at least may be pointed out here. The different clans in the Peruvian state were distinguished by the way in which their hair was dressed, tressed, parted, top-knotted, tufted, etc., which is just the way the Indic clans were distinguished.²

Speaking of clans I would remind you of the decimal system of organization recommended in the Hindu law-books, in accordance with which a group of ten families or villages forms part of a larger group of a hundred, this of a thousand, and a general overseer is over all. So the Peruvian state is based on ten families, part of a larger group of one hundred, and this of a thousand. The priestly caste at the head has the privilege of not being obnoxious to capital punishment, just like a Brahman. But among the Chibchas or Muiscans of Colombia there is a more remarkable resemblance. The high-priest is like a Buddhist Lama, secluded and too holy to touch earth; he belongs to an inherited hierarchy, though individually elected. The whole Chibcha constitution divides the people into four castes, priests, warriors, agriculturists (including traders and craftsmen), and helots or tributary nomads, almost an exact duplication of the Hindu caste-system. The priests are hereditary in the female line and act as shamans, judges, and executioners.

² In Peru, the first cutting of a child's hair was done by an elder relative, who used a stone knife. The Inca crown-prince's lock was first cut by the high-priest. In some South American states a hair-cut was a privilege and long hair was a mark of servitude, religious belief yielding to convenience.

The soul-problem touched on above raises the question whether the Indic and Indian views agree in any marked way. Besides hair-soul, as all students of lower religions know, there is a soul or power inherent in various parts of the body, notably in the saliva or spittle. Thus in the Rig-Veda a girl preparing food for a god chews the grain first. The subject has been adequately discussed by L. von Schroeder. Now this chewing of grain in divine rites is found among our Indians. Among the Hopi, for example, there is a sacrifice of chewed grain and the Peruvian *acca* is prepared by women who first chew and then boil and ferment it, because, as is expressly said in both cases, saliva is medicinal. Another point in regard to the soul. The Northern Indian believes in metempsychosis in life, that is, a wizard becomes a wolf (were-wolf), but seldom believes that a dead man is reborn as an animal. Yet the dead are reborn as men, finding their growth-soul among the bones preserved for that purpose. Moreover the Dakotas believed that to become a wizard one must be born again four times in the same body, dreaming of gods between the times of reincarnation, and this seems to be a true theory of metempsychosis. I would say that though in theory according to Brahman belief a man may be reborn as anything, yet it is generally assumed that the reincarnation will be in human form. In regard to the dead, they are not buried among some of the Plain Indians but hung upon trees or raised on primitive towers of silence, as were the dead Parsi and some Hindus (thus the Mandans and Siouan tribes generally). Mummification is not Indic, so I will not stop to explain the mummies of Peru, but I should like to compare the killing of objects put into the grave in Peru and India. The warrior's bow is broken in the Vedic burial hymn because it must be dead like its master; so in Peru all objects for the next life are killed or broken. The Peruvian widow also like the Hindu is expected but not formally required to commit suttee. Death is called the Shade in Peru, Supay, and this Shadow as god (to whom sacrifice is made) is like Chāyā, Shadow, as a name of Śiva (but cf. also Celtic Scath as a giant as well as Shade). Instead of gods carried into battle (this is common; they were wrapped-up images) such as Mextli, the Chibchas sometimes carried the mummified corpses of great warriors, as the Peruvian Chancu carried the body of Uscovilca, a former

hero. This seems to imply that the warrior was still potent, but it may have been merely to inspire courage. Sacrifice to the Manes is common to all tribes and requires no comment, but the Digger sacrificed to a dog as ancestor; he was a Dog-man, such as is also found in India. Of dogs in hell or leading to hell, there are two, but not of the same race. The Aztec dog is black and the Peruvian is red.

A word may be said here of creation-myths. The Eskimos believe that woman was created from man's thumb, as Dakṣa in India is created from Brahman's toe, but there is no close resemblance. The creator and cosmic egg may appear in the story of Manco Capac, Great Man (cf. Puruṣa), and Mama Ocello, but Ocello is also understood as the moon. On the other hand the paired gods of the Hopi are like the androgynous deity of India. These pairs are usually the male and his female counterpart, like Indra Indrāṇī, but sometimes, as in Mexico, two brother suns are found. One of the most interesting parallels is that on the higher plane of speculation found in Mexico. As is well known, Brahman in India receives as creator little homage because he is no longer active. So in Mexico in the higher realm of theology there was a creator-god, but he received no sacrifice and generally he was identified with the national Uitzilopochtli or regarded as a god of medicinal power who sent and cured diseases. But children's diseases were caused by hags, who were in fact the ghosts of women dying in childbirth, and were associated with the god of war and lightning, so that these mothers appeared in the form of lightning-flashes. Now this is a perfect parallel to the Mothers accompanying Śiva. Their main function was to send diseases to children, just as in India, and they too were attendants of the god of battle and storm. Before leaving this Aztec pantheon I must mention Tezcatlipoca, who is the stern god of law and justice. He spies upon men and wanders about looking for those who disregard his laws. As good a parallel to Varuṇa as could be found, and no need to go to Babylon to find him!

To touch again upon the subject of personal markings, which I introduced above by accident apropos of the hair-parting, I would call attention to the resemblance between the sectarian markings of the devotees of Viṣṇu and Śiva, the one vertical and the other horizontal, and the markings on the figures of

Mexican gods, the agricultural gods having vertical and the hunting-gods having horizontal stripes. There seems, however, to be no inner connection in these practices, though there is a striking likeness, for Viṣṇu and agriculture and vertical lines may be said to make one group, as Śiva and hunting and horizontal lines make another. But apropos of women there is another curious coincidence. According to Hindu law a girl is married at 11 or 12 or younger and a man at 24 or 30. In North America the girl was married at 11 or 12 (in Peru at eighteen to twenty) and the man at twenty-four. At his initiation the Siouan boy had to stand on a stone while the priest prayed for his welfare to the four quarters as divine beings, Winds or Directions. Now the stone in this ritual is distinctly said to represent earth, and this reminds us that at her wedding a girl in India has to stand on a stone, which also as an emblem of firmness represents the earth.

The four divine Winds or Directions just mentioned are a perfect parallel to the Hindu four gods of the quarters, in regard to whom I have written elsewhere. The gods of the quarters or directions in India are of course subsidiary gods; they have been subdued by the greater gods of a higher cult. But they are old and in antiquity are very lofty gods, to whom are sometimes added two more, the god of the zenith and the god of the nadir. Now in America these gods were almost the only real gods acknowledged by the Northern tribes. For example, in the seventeenth century the Algonkins themselves said that they had only these four gods and him above. In some of the rituals again, the Hopi Indians added to the four the one below and the one above, just as the Hindus did. I need not remind you that the number four is interwoven with the whole religious ritual of America from Maine to Cuzco in Peru. The tree of life was a four-fold cross in Mexico, for example, which betokened weal in four directions, a svastika, and all the religious ceremonial turned about this number, circumambulations of the temple, the dishes to receive the sacrificial blood, the number of priests, etc., were fours or multiples of four. There can be no question but that the four chief Hindu gods of the old pantheon, Agni, Yama, Varuna, Indra, are really names given to the same four divine quarters as those of the American Indians. May I add an inconsequent note, on the subject of the tree of life? As

emblem of weal and hence of health, it was itself, this Aztec svastika, a quasi-divine thing, a sort of Aesculapius, and to it was made a sacrifice—of what? You will not be surprised to hear that it was a cock, almost the ‘cock of Aesculapius’ in Mexican form. The cock is the bird that announces the sun (as in the Avesta) and hence the bird of health; consequently a sacrifice to health is the cock. This association is reflected, very dimly I admit, in the association of the health-giving rain with the peacock in India. The direct parallel here fails, for the Hindu cock is the bird of the god of battles, obviously as a fighting bird.

I have intimated that whereas the Hindus gave gods to their four quarters, the Redskins simply deified the quarters without giving them divine names. But the impact of the higher faith has had an effect in Yucatan not unlike that in India. For in Yucatan the four direction-deities have not been rejected by the Catholic Church but adroitly incorporated into it as ministers of the Trinity and here not only are the four directions represented by four colors (this is general, though the colors are not always identical), but they have been named; the god of the east (red) is now St. Dominic; of the north (white), St. Gabriel; of the west (black), St. James; and of the south (yellow), Mary Magdalene. After this fashion has many an ancient deity been preserved beyond his natural retiring-age. You will remember that it was in the nineteenth century that Grecian peasants were still praying to the image of Demeter and perhaps at this very moment the girls of Sicily are singing that exquisite hymn to Venus recorded but lately by Professor Ridgeway’s friend:—

O santa Venera,
Sì bella, sì tenera,
Che in Paradiso
Tripa avanti Gesù!

There is to me something very alluring in this conversion of Venus into a saint dancing before Gesu and in turning the gods to whom our Indians used to pray into such saints as Gabriel and Mary Magdalene. Just so, we may be sure, four gods of direction, functioning as such or as winds, were worshiped first in India, until later they renounced their anonymity in favor of Agni, Indra, and the other gods who had names but were originally without relation to the four points or winds. You

may ask, perhaps in jest, whether the intrusion of Mary Magdalene is not something quite without parallel, a feminine element not recognized in India. But I shall point to Bhartṛhari, who sings of a Dikkanyā, or feminine guardian of direction.

This is as good a place as any to compare the gods themselves. There is no doubt that the Aztecs are merely a southern wave of Shoshonean Indians and their gods are in fact only gigantic figures already known in smaller shape in the North. But I shall not go into details here, nor point out the closer similarity between Indra and Tlaloc, Yama and the god of Mictlan, Varuṇa and Viracocha (in Peru), and Agni and the 'old old' god of fire, since these nature-gods are in part not unlike other foreign gods having similar functions. Yet there are a few points in respect of the gods which I cannot leave unnoticed. Tlaloc as god of war and fertility has priests dressed as frogs who to induce rain have to imitate frogs and quack like them. The Hopi have a frog-drama of fertility, where reproduction is drastically represented. In Peru the summer solstice (December) is introduced by a purificatory flogging and a tug of war on a varicolored rope of four colors. The Eskimos have a similar tug by men representing two kinds of birds, the issue of the strife being prophetic of the year. Finally there is the Tunja year-end feast, in which twelve men in red dramatize a dirge around one man in black, obviously an American lament for Adonis, as the year-contest is a drama of magical content for the assurance of a good year, probably of the same sort as the Bogota harvest-festival in which men appear in masks and animal-skins. In the Hopi performance the vegetation-god, Mûyinwu, is actually decked with corn and has the signs of sun and rain, and the dance around this figure is almost a maypole-dance.³ Some of

³ In the Oraibi Soyal ceremony (of nine days at the winter solstice) the mask is decorated with figures of frogs, imitation ears of corn-husks, red horse-hair, and eagle feathers. A sort of svastika-fringe runs around the top. The performing Katsinas talk in a disguised voice, imitate cohabitation, and make constant use of saliva and honey (spat from the mouth). One man represents a (sun-)hawk. A special figure images Mûyinwu (spirit of generation). The Star priest revolves the Sun-image, being baptized by the (representative of the) war-god, while a song is sung in honor of the feathered-serpent, Lölöekon, and the Sun-priest dances. The sacred *bahos* are sticks, marked as male and female, symbols and causers of all good luck but chiefly of fertility, which are finally deposited

these elements appear in the Hindu drama of Kṛṣṇa and Kāṁsa. To mention briefly a few points in connection with the other gods. The Hades of Mictlan is reached by traversing underground deserts, rough hills, winds that cut like knives, and four or nine streams. One passes to the next world over a log or a bridge made of spider-thread (Northern and Southern, respectively) and some of the Algonkins believe that the parting of the ways to good and evil worlds is revealed by a lightning-flash, while a spirit guides the good on farther to paradise, which, I admit, is rather Persian than Indic. Persian too, or Zoroastrian, is the fervent conviction of the Peruvian sun-worshipers expressed in the phrase, 'the army of the Incas is the army of the Lord (Sun-god),' though the spirit of the utterance infuses Indic thought as well. Of the fire-god I will say only that he is represented as black-green-yellow, that he hid in water (also in stone), and that the fire is solemnly renewed each year by all Indians, from the Sioux to the Peruvians, who had a solemn fire-renewal at Rimac every June. All these are Hindu Agni-traits. Further it is interesting to note the sacred character of the sacrificial straw. On the Plains this is usually of sage. Thus in the Cheyenne Fifth Paint the priest carefully spreads the sacrificial sage-bushes in four heaps for the four gods of direction and one more for the sun, on which the priest dances and others sing to the sun. Here, too, I must refer to the swinging-ceremony still retained by the Plain-Indians and called 'looking at the sun,' which I cannot doubt is identical with the sun-swinging ceremony of India.⁴ In America the Indian has hooks placed

in the Sun-house, after being first consecrated with meal and honey-saliva. They are usually made for cloud-deities; but sometimes for the dead who, gratified by this attention, will send good crops to the Hopi. The ritual smoking is chiefly for 'cloud-making.' Fasting, bathing, and prayer make part of the rite, in which the powdered hearts and intestines of slain enemies are used as magical fertility-powers. The number four is conspicuous in the ritual though the altar-stones are arranged for six directions (in color they are here yellow-north, green-west, red-south, white-east, black-zenith, variegated-nadir).

See Dorsey and Voth, *FCM Pub. 53* (1901).

'The 'freeing of the horse' by the Pawnees is a sacrifice 'to the spirit,' possibly to the sun. The rite itself reminds one of the horse of conquest in India, but the animal is set free as a sacrifice and remains a sacred animal.

under the muscles of his back and swings all day or till he is exhausted. The idea of a sun-boat also appears in America (Algonkin) and it is tempting to see in this a survival of the swing, perhaps to connect it even with the Vedic sage's excursion in the boat or swing of the heaven-god.

It will not be necessary to refer to fertility-charms of the heart's blood (Aztec) nor to the fertility-goddess Mayauel, who rides upon a tortoise, as does Ayopechtli, the birth-goddess; but, in passing by other aspects of serpent-cult as vegetation-deity (the relation between serpent and fertility is too common to be useful), I would call attention to the thoroughly Indic notion connected with the winged-serpent Quetzalcoatl, who, 'coiled up as a snake, waits for the beginning of the new era,' exactly as Viṣṇu sleeps on his coiled-up Nāga. There is in Quetzalcoatl a Messianic idea that he will return bringing a new age, although, as god of the east and so of the east wind he sometimes descends so low as to be nothing more than wind or breeze, and as a breeze he lulls to sleep and so is invoked by thieves to put to sleep the persons who are to be robbed, as the Vedic thief has a little prayer lulling his victims to sleep. This leads me to remark that the Indian conception of the divine voice is always that of a low indistinct murmur, an unintelligible voice of sacred character understood only by the priest. In India the voice of gods reflects their natural phenomenal character and is always a loud roar, unless indeed the god goes disguised. And the unintelligible murmur is rather that of the unintelligible ancient dialect. Before parting from the sun I may add that the primitive Aztec oath is one taken by sun and earth, and that the one who swears does so by touching earth and putting it to his lips. In India the one who swears also touches earth but I do not know that he 'eats earth.'

Only remotely connected with the gods is the teaching in regard to the five ages found in Mayan and Mexican cosmology but in a fragmentary condition. By comparing the different accounts it seems that there was a theory of five ages called suns. The fifth age or sun has no name; it is the present age. The four ages preceding this are called the ages of Earth, Fire, Air, and Water, but the Aztecs have incorporated their own gods as regents of these ages. The pre-Aztec conception appears to be that the first age was destroyed by beasts, who devoured the

men and giants of that Earth-age. Then came the Fire-age, destroyed by storms, when men became monkeys. Then followed the Air-age, when Tlaloc sent rain and lightning out of the air. This was followed by the Water-age of Chalahuitlicue, when a deluge destroyed the earth and men became fishes. Here again the five ages are rather Greek than Indic, but the conception of the final deluge (the deluge idea being pan-American) is that of the end of the aeon familiar to Indic thought. Also the idea that the gods are swept away with the end of the age is reflected in the anxiety with which the end of the calendar cycle is looked upon. At the close of this (fifty-two years) there is the greatest fear lest the sun may not rise and services are held, directed to the continuation of his existence. By the way, it may be mentioned also that the Hindus believe that the gods go away every year and for a season the world is god-less. So too in Peru there is an anxious moment called 'Return of the gods,' when the gods, who all have been away somewhere, are returning. In September there is a mark discovered on a heap of maize put there for this purpose, and when the priest discovers the 'foot-step of the god' great joy follows with a drunken orgy, for the gods may end with the age and no man knows when that shall be.

This drunken orgy is, as in India, part of a divine service. Communion with the Indian god was obtained through intoxication, as it was obtained also through eating the victim identified with the god. The intoxicating oetli was itself a divinity like Soma, and when in Colombia, for example, on a pilgrimage (for pilgrimages to holy watering places were as common as in India) a man got so drunk as to die, he was regarded as having sacrificed himself and became a sainted character. Only in one respect the Mexican differed from the Hindu, for in Mexican Tarascan we are told that divine intoxication was also induced by smoking!

Speaking of communion with divinity I should like to call attention also to the proxy gods of Mexico and Peru in the shape of dough-images like those eaten in lieu of the animal victim by the Viṣṇuite. At certain divine festivals images of the Aztec gods, for example, were made of dough, and when the image had been shot to pieces the dough-fragments were devoured as pieces of the god. The communion by intoxication

seems to be rather that of the supposedly divine exaltation than by drinking of the divine blood, and this is substantiated by the parallel use of tobacco, the 'communion' here being necessarily that of ecstasy implicitly understood as of divine origin.

In Peru religion was rather more elevated than in the North. Thus the baptism of the Northern Indians (like that of the Hindus) became total immersion and so the intoxicant itself became a divinity. Here too we have the only approach to a trinity, not like ours but quite like that of India, for just as Brahman, Viṣṇu, and Śiva represent only different sectarian and eventually different geographical conceptions of one highest god, each highest being then equated with its sectarian-geographical rival, so in Peru the great god was really a combination of the Incas' Sun-god as highest god, with the highest god of the littoral, Panchacamac, and the highest inland god of the Quichuas, overcome by the Incas, the lake-god Viracocha. It is to this Viracocha-Panchacamac as at once creation-, water-, and sun-god that the most intellectual Peruvians prayed as to the Supreme Deity, generally invoked by the Peruvian Inca as Viracocha. May I close with citing some of the verses addressed to this god, not without an implicit question as to whether, if they were found in India, we should not think it necessary to refer them to a Babylonian origin?

'O Viracocha, Lord of the universe, whether thou art male or female, lord of reproduction, whatsoever thou mayest be, Lord of divination, where art thou? God above, god below, god all around, thy throne and scepter splendid! Oh hear me, whether from the sky above, or from the sea beneath, or wherever thou mayest be. Creator of all the world, maker of all men, lord of all lords, my eyes fail me, longing to see thee; for the sole longing to know thee. O might I behold thee, might I but know thee, might I understand thee! But do thou look upon me, for thou knowest me. The sun and the moon, the day and the night, the summer and winter—verily thou hast not ordained them for naught; but they travel in order to their places, as thou, O my god, hast assigned them; they come to the end that thou hast determined, going whithersoever thou pleasest. Thou holdest the royal scepter (thou art my lord); hear thou me; choose me; keep me from weariness, save me from death.'

So also cries the Vedic poet, 'O would that I might see my

god!’ and he, too, admires the unceasing procession of the days and seasons.

A bit from another hymn: ‘Wilt thou make known to me who thou really art? Art thou what I thought thee, or art thou a phantom, a thing that makes fear? O could I know it, O could it be shown me! Thou who hast made me of earth and of clay, look thou upon me; old am I, dying; but thou art my maker.’⁵

Here the parallel is not verbal, but this and the first extract express the tone of those Vedic hymns which are now referred to the West with the idea that they are too lofty for India’s thought. I too would refer to the West, but much farther West than Babylon, and refer not the Vedic hymns, but those who think that an Indian (or Hindu) may not also have ideas and emotions and the use of language similar to that of other people when religiously exalted.

This does not imply that it is not quite legitimate to make comparisons when connection is otherwise probable; only that it is temerarious to base connection even on a close similarity.

⁵ Sir Clements R. Markham, *The Incas of Peru*, 1910, p. 100 (from the translation of Miguel Mossi of Bolivia, 1892).